

Bleak budget plan bothers councillors

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City councillors are calling staff proposals for deep service cuts "unrealistic" and "suicidal," but Mayor Larry O'Brien says they didn't go far enough.

O'Brien yesterday welcomed staff's budget reduction options (see story, page 1) as "comprehensive, clear and easy to understand," but said that the proposed 4.9 per cent tax hike was still too high. However, he wouldn't commit to a tax freeze in 2009.

"This is a very difficult

time. We have a lot of pressures," he said. "Our citizens are delaying buying new cars. They are putting off vacations. I think the ... taxpayers of the city are fully expecting the city government to do the same."

But councillors say that will be difficult to do, since municipalities don't have the luxury of running deficits. Alta Vista ward Coun. Peter Hume said people expect the city to maintain core services.

"During the good times, when a one per cent tax increase would not have been a problem, we froze taxes," he said. "We didn't

700 The number of child care spaces that could be cut by the city in order to prevent a tax hike of more than five per cent. METRO NEWS SERVICES

plan for the bad times and now there's no room to maneuver."

Orleans Coun. Bob Monette said proposals to hike user fees for municipal pools and sports fields while cutting outdoor skating rinks would be political "suicide."

"The residents of Ottawa will not tolerate cuts like this and there is no way I'd

support it," he said.

Coun. Rick Chiarelli (College ward) called it unrealistic to propose eliminating outdoor rinks and slashing arts funding.

City manager Kent Kirkpatrick defended the cost-cutting recommendations as the best available, noting he asked councillors a month ago for ideas but didn't receive a response.

The proposal to cut 700 childcare spaces especially raised flags.

Since the proposed increase is already \$148, Coun. Alex Cullen said an extra \$30 or so would be a small increase.

Budget slows police proposals

Successful new crime units' expansion handcuffed

A lean Ottawa Police budget means only minor expansion to special units, but service levels and officer visibility will be increased, says the chief. Police Chief Vern White said he would have liked to expand on the success of the city's successful new Street Crime Unit, beat squads and the Direct Action Response Team, but the force can't afford it right now.

"You'll see the street crime unit expand its mandate a bit in 2009 and start targeting

some of the high risk areas in the east and west because they've primarily worked in central, but there is always more you can do."

The police are already projecting for a \$13.5 million increase in its 2009 operating budget, bringing the total budget to \$234.8 million.

With an extra \$3.6 million coming from assessment growth, police costs should add \$9.9 million to the overall city budget, or \$25 extra for the average homeowner.